



The Sky Is NOT Falling!

Combat Resilience



*Special Operations Psychology - Force Multiplication
for the 21st Century*

The views expressed here represent concepts being implemented within Air Force Special Operations Command - and, do not necessarily reflect the official position of the US Air Force or the Air Force Medical Service.

My intent is for us to further strengthen the military men and women who serve our nations interests - and for whom I have the deepest respect.

Carroll Greene, Col, USAF

Chief Operational Psychology

**Air Force Special Operations
Command**

**DSN: 579-5649 / COM: 850-884-
5649**

Carroll.Greene@hurlburt.af.mil

Dilemmas

- Our stress avoidant culture . . and media sensationalized **focus on damage and dysfunction** - conflict with the positive attitudes and resilience of our warriors.
- Our medical system is one of the best in the world at **detecting illness, deficiency or damage**. In a desire to help, we scan for weakness that we can help repair. And, our system is most accepting of those with a predominantly submissive mindset
- In a desire to help – some leaders may tend to focus most attention on the smaller portion of warriors - those who have significant problems – **“the 10% rule”**
- Despite generally good intentions – **over-emphasis on dysfunction** – often enhances negative focus in the force, increases fear and – **through negative suggestion - can undermine resilience.**
“The road to hell is paved with good intentions.”

Trends Undermining Resilience

- ❑ Most information media consistently present a negatively biased picture of human behavior and world events.
- ❑ “Stimulate conflict, increase fear, point the finger of blame”, “bad news 24/7”; “If it bleeds – It leads!”.

A Frequent Media Message and Growing American Belief

- ❑ Americans should not have to suffer or be uncomfortable. Everyone should be able to enjoy the American dream without sacrifice or suffering.
- ❑ Someone in authority should be acting to protect you from adversity or discomfort. If you can find someone – other than yourself - to blame for your discomfort – you may even be able to get some compensation for it!

Everyone is “special” - Nobody should have to sit on the bench - and,

Everyone should get a trophy!

Top 10

Combat Stress Myths

Combat Stress has mostly negative effects on our people

A large percentage of our troops return from deployment with PTSD, Depression or Anxiety Disorders

A large percentage of people who have PTSD or other disorders are disabled

Many military veterans who have PTSD are overly impulsive or even dangerous

It would be good if everyone who has deployed - received mandatory mental health screening

The military has done a poor job of encouraging members to get help when they need it

Learning about combat stress can help members avoid the negative effects

Combat Stress is causing lots of service members to leave the military

PTSD is a disorder that generally affects only combat exposed military members

The effect of PTSD on families is almost always negative

The Effects of Combat Stress – just a few!

No Pain - No Gain!

- **Increase appreciation for American values and lifestyle**
- **Increase respect for other cultures and people**
- **Strengthen your love for home and family**
- **Enhance respect of others for your service**
- **Strengthen your commitment to loved ones**
- **Affirm your service at the “point of our nation’s spear”**
- **Become a strengthening part of your self-image**
- **Strengthen your spiritual development**
- **Become a scar you can wear with humility and pride**
- **Test and define you as a man or woman . . and a warrior**
- **Forever strengthen you for future challenges**
- **Broaden your perspective on our world issues**
- **Energize your personal goals and efforts**

Positively focused leaders help shape resilience

Resilience?

- Could / should – adjustments be made to our medical perspective – and/or our leadership focus – to enhance support for resilience in our forces?

No Pain . . . No Gain!

Resilience - an ability to recover from or adjust to change or misfortune.

Resilience is derived from:

- 1. Three ingrained adaptive attitudes - toward the value of adversity, sacrifice and perseverance**
- 2. Two skill-sets / processes - that enhance effectiveness of the 3 attitudes**

Maddi and Khoshaba, Resilience At Work, 2005

3 Component Attitudes of Resilience

- **Commitment** - *whatever I am focused on is worth my best effort*
- **Control** - *in a crisis, I focus on the things I can control*
- **Challenge** - *I see change or adversity as a barrier to be overcome*

What doesn't kill me - makes me stronger!

The 2 Resilience Processes

- **Transformational Coping** – mentally developing a broader perspective to integrate the surprise and impact of the change into a positive long term view – and positive strategies for the near term
- **Social Support** – engaging others positively in mutually helpful views and strategies – using adversity as an opportunity get ideas - develop group strength - and support others

What Is My Patient's Mind-Set?

Warrior Mindset – seek challenges, confront threats to develop confidence in control, commitment and skills. They want to be confident that their honor and survival will be insured by their positive attitude, aggressiveness, discipline, teamwork and training. See the doctor as their temporary consultant. If they submit to external control it will be a conscious choice – to achieve an objective.

Warrior resilience is based on assumptions of Internal Locus of Control (ILC).

Acquiescent Mindset – try to avoid adversity, tend to seek comfort, may identify with a personal deficiency or dysfunction. They often seek an external source of expertise and influence to help them cope with the stresses life pushes at them. May see doctors as in control of a system that they are dependent upon. They draw some comfort from the belief that someone else is in control – but, may also be easily angered when frustrated by that system.

**I don't want my warriors to become patients!
These people generally make assumptions based on External Locus of Control (ELC)!
become warriors!**

Warrior Values and Objectives

Warriors are identifiable. They are drawn to military service because they:

**want to test themselves
want to challenge their skills and character
want to develop personal strength for success in
value adversity as a strength builder
want to be part of a close knit team
want to win the respect of their peers
want a responsible, significant role in team success
look for excitement to energize their life
want to feel pride in service to our nation and their unit**

heritage

**are energetic and take pride in their work
recognize danger and adversity as facts of life and strive for
mastery**



This mindset breeds more strength and resilience.



“People who detect and focus on my weaknesses . . make me nervous!”

“I tend to trust people who see and focus on my strengths. I instinctively know that focusing on my weakness could make me more vulnerable.”

“I don’t like to need anything from others - but, if I do - I prefer to get my advice from people who see and focus on my strengths.”

Typical Negative - Counterproductive Focus

- **It's just awful . . that so many of our soldiers are coming back with psychological and neurological problems!**
- **It's bad . . that the military culture emphasizes toughness . . and, could hinder efforts to get troops to seek help.**
- **It's bad that - only 40% of soldiers referred to mental health actually go for help.**
- **It's a problem . . when the military still hasn't fixed it so soldiers can feel comfortable going to mental health for help!**
- **It's bad that - 3 out of 5 soldiers still fear it might hurt their career if people thought they needed mental help?**

Military leaders and medical professionals can help counter the negative influence of the risk averse mindset . . and, develop stronger credibility and positive influence within our own military culture?

Positive and Productive Perspective

more compatible with the warrior mindset!

- It's great that fully 80 to 93% of our military men and women will end up with lifelong strengths that come from deployment/combat experiences!
- I'm thankful the military emphasizes toughness. Can you imagine the effectiveness of our military forces . . . if most warriors thought they needed professional experts to help them cope with stress?
- What portion of elected representatives, news commentators, medical professionals, etc'. . . might be concerned that public knowledge of their personal need for medical or mental health treatment . . . might hurt their career?

Conceptual Shift - to a Resilience Model

- **If you don't have PTSD -
Can you have "symptoms of PTSD"?**
- **ANS: No you can't! You have "battle-mind" -
or - "conditioned survival reaction". Even
"symptom" implies pathology.**
- **Are some events "traumatic" ?**
- **ANS: No! An event is not traumatic in itself!
Trauma occurs through interaction between
individual vulnerability and an event.
"Traumatic Event" is a medical term that
has meaning only in relation to an individual
patient's "trauma".**

Embrace the Phenomenal Empowering Effects of Your Combat Stress!

- **Battlemind** - “the warrior’s inner strength to face fear and adversity in combat with courage - an element of resilience.” The term “battle-mind” - is a positive vision - suggesting the psychological strength of our troops. It is a term to replace the psychologically dysfunctional suggestion - “symptom” or “symptoms of PTSD”.
- **PTSD** - an otherwise useless doctor’s short hand term. . that describes an automatic and miraculous set of quickly conditioned. . life saving behaviors - that are valued and understood best by those who have faced their own potential death. These powerful tools are least respected by those who live in protected circumstances and rarely face fear. Like any weapon system - they must be mastered and managed safely through effective coaching!
- **Combat Stress** - a high risk personal challenge - a test - that strong people voluntarily enter to express and test their values - and to test and develop their strengths. Those who enter - and emerge on the other side - with the proper attitudes - will be forever changed for the better - and will seldom be defeated by lesser challenges in life.

Individual Protective Factors

Insure Performance and Resilience

- Attitude of Invulnerability – balanced by – Serious Training / Skill Development
- Evidence of Skills – that are effective in the situation you now face
- Faith in Conditioning, Training and Self-Preservation Reactions
- Knowledge that some self-doubt is common among our strongest warriors
- Belief that self-doubt will stop – when my focus shifts to mission and survival
- Fear of letting down your team – or dishonoring your values
- Seeing High Value and Honor in one's personal service and sacrifice
- Personal emotional attachment to our military heritage of service and sacrifice
- Desire to be tested against an ultimate standard of man/womanhood
- Philosophy of life embracing the defensibility of violence in some situations
- Recognition of danger as a fact of everyday life - striving for mastery of it

Pre-Deployment Training

What do warriors need - to potentiate resilience? Who can best provide this training?

Concepts that inspire confidence in the power of

- Aggressiveness, Fear and Adversity - to develop REAL lifelong strength and confidence**
- Personal Honor, Sacrifice and Selflessness**
- Training and Conditioning**
- The Human Body**
- A Brotherhood of Warriors**
- Teamwork**
- Personal Moral Values**
- Human Strength**
- Spirituality, Faith and Prayer**
- Unit Heritage**
- The warrior's ability to transcend mortal vulnerability - and do superhuman things**
- Respected Leadership**
- Adrenalin to produce super-normal strength and speed**
- The crucible of Combat Stress - to form lifelong strengths, broader perspective, irreplaceable bonds and the cornerstone of lifelong confidence!**

Advice for Warriors

On Getting Help When You Want It

- **It's your choice!** Deployment and combat experience and their effects- can be viewed **positively or negatively**
- Avoid getting overly focused on the negative – this “glass” is actually $\frac{3}{4}$ full
- Expect the positive – but stay alert to your possible need for some mental health coaching
- Warriors should control their use of the coaching resource – and, use it to – 1. develop new perspective – 2. increase internal strength – and to - 3. set or achieve personal goals

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Resilience Posture

Forging Warrior Strength



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